



***Zuhd* (Asceticism) as a Catholicon for Good Governance in Nigeria**

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Abstract: The imperativeness of good governance in the political setup of any nation cannot be overemphasized. In Nigeria for example, one of the major factors that hinder good governance is lack of *zuhd* (asceticism) among the leaders. As a matter of fact, Nigeria as a nation is one of the most blessed countries of both human and natural resources. Her economic status might have become a suzerain among other nations across the globe if it is judiciously managed by the leaders. Unfortunately, the problems of mismanagement, corruption and mal-appropriation of funds by the political leaders have weakened the economic potentials and have affected the good governance in Nigeria. As a result, a great number of casualties among the citizens are suffering of unemployment, critical poverty, and other socio-economic vices, as a result of bad governance, which in turn has affected the political system of Nigeria. It is also pathetic that very few among the Nigerians especially, the politicians are avariciously and selfishly enjoying the nation's wealth at the detriment of the populace. Against this background, this paper aims at studying the concept of *zuhd* as a prospective panacea for the emancipation of good governance in Nigeria. The methodologies used in this work are theoretical and descriptive. The work concludes that *zuhd* is much necessary to control the present bad governance in Nigeria, especially the avaricious attitude of some leaders towards the accumulation of the nation's wealth, and if carefully utilized, there is tendency for political sustainability in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Islam, Zuhd, Catholicon, Governance, Nigeria.*

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Introduction

Zuhd is an Arabic term which means asceticism in English language. Literarily, *Zuhd* connotes renunciation, austerity, self-discipline, self-denial, etc. *Zuhd* is among the religious concept which involves a practice that will lead to the practisoners to secure the pleasure of Allah (files.eric.ed.gov. 1). However, Islam in all its entity acknowledges the application of *Zuhd* (asceticism) as a mechanism to regulate the avarice of people towards mundane materials. This is why Islam kicks against wasteful spending, vandalizing of resources, abnormal accumulation of wealth or property, stinginess, avarice, mal-appropriation of public or private funds, looting of treasury, and many other un-Islamic attitudes in the accumulation of wealth. (Ambali M.A, 1998) Actually, Islam creates avenue for seeking for worldly benefits, but in accordance with Islamic injunctions. Therefore, in pursuance of property and disposal of it is judiciously modified in Islam. Allah aptly says:

But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah Hs been good to thee, and seek not (occasion for) mischief in the land, for Allah loves not those who do mischief. (Q28:77)

The above verse is an indication that there is avenue for human beings to quest for wealth, but in a way that pleases Allah. In addition, *rizq* (wealth) is a decree and favour by Allah only on His servants, but unequally distributed. Therefore, Islam states that Muslims who possesses abundant wealth to use it in *halāl* (lawful) way and make it to be circulated to the poor through charity, almsgiving and some other charitable benefits. Thus, by doing this, the life would be meaningful to the less privilege among the people. Thus, this is why *Zakāt*, *Waqf* and *Ṣadaqah* are institutionalized in Islam. (Abdul-Raheem, M.A. 1983)

Despite the fact that Nigeria is blessed with both human and natural resources, it is unfortunate that lack of application of *Zuhd* in the political



administrative system in Nigeria, especially among the leaders and political officeholders has weakened the economic potentials of this nation. It also impoverishes many Nigerians system of living. Unfortunately, very few among the Nigerians avariciously dominate the nation's wealth at the detriment of the large populace.

Economic and Financial Crimes in Nigeria

The current economic deprivation in Nigeria calls for reformation and revival. Nigeria is popularly known as the biggest country in West Africa and is popularly called giant of Africa, blessed with bountiful resources. The citizens of Nigeria would have lived happily, but unfortunately the problem of corruption that erodes the nation has weakened the potentials of many of them financially. Barau defines corruption as dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power typically involving bribery (Barau, A.S.2004). It is noted that this kind of definition of corruption is restricted to those in power such as political office holders, the elected members among the executives, the legislatures, among others. Morris (1991), defines corruption as illegitimate use of power to benefit private interest. However, from these two definitions one can infer the definition of corruption as illegitimate use of power, resources, authority and other benefits which ought to be shared by the populace but avariciously dominated by few people in a nation.

Actually, there are various faces of corruption in Nigeria, these include: corruptions in Nigeria politics, Universities and Colleges, law enforcement agencies, sports and athletics, religious affiliations and centres, internet, businesses, both public and private sectors, and many more. As a fact, there are some factors that led to the corruption in Nigeria such as, greediness, poor youth empowerment, poverty and underemployment and unemployment, etc. However, our focus in this paper among these factors is that of greediness. This is because it is one of the major



causes of corruption in Nigeria, and if it is regulated, other causes would equally be checked.

According to Oxford Dictionary, greed is a selfish or excessive desire for more than is needed or deserved, especially of money, wealth, food, or other possessions. One tends to know that greed is the backbone of corruption in Nigeria, because of accumulation of what is not needed by a few people has made life hard and unbearable for the remaining subjects. It is also an element of intimidation, tyranny, inequality, and some other socio-financial vices, which later put the oppressed among the citizens into depravity and poverty. Mike (2015) posits that:

Corruption in Nigeria wears many kinds of unattractive and dirty clothes. The situation has made so many people feel a lot of pains as the money which would have been used to reduce poverty in the country are being channelled into the pockets of a small group of persons.

It is glaring that the corruption which Mike refers to here is synonymous to greediness. This unscrupulous attitude has become a normal habit among the heartless leaders in Nigeria. It is unfortunate that Nigerians are suffering of economic instability and hyperinflation because of greediness among their leaders. For instance, according to Transparency International (The Global Civil Society Organization Leading the Fight Against Corruption), in the years 2000 and 2001, Nigeria was 90th position in terms of corruption out of the 90 and 91 countries surveyed respectively. In the years 2002 and 2003, it was ranked as the second-most corrupt country in the world, while in the year 2004 Nigeria was third most corrupt out of 146 nations surveyed in the world. In 2005, 2006 and 2007, Nigeria was ranked 8th, 21st and 33rd world's most corrupt nation respectively. In the years 2012, 2013 and 2014, Nigeria was 37th, 33rd and 38th position in corruption across the globe respectively. In 2015 and 2016, Nigeria was ranked 32nd and 40th position of the world's corrupt nations respectively. (Assessed on 20/01/2023)

Based on this finding, one can understand that the level of corruption in Nigeria in 2015 and 2016 despite of the proclamation and activities of President



Muhammad Buhari's administration to fight corruption still increasing. This is unfortunate. The parameter implies that Nigerian leaders have been deepened in greediness which influences them to steal the nation's wealth and properties despite the government policy on anti-corruption. For instance, before the inception of President Muhammad's Buhari into power, \$2.1 billion which was hallmarked for purchasing arms to fight Boko Haram operatives disappeared during Goodluck Jonathan regime. The total amount of N1trn recovered by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was said to be diverted by one Ibrahim Lamorde. Former Adamawa Governor, Murtala Nyako was accused of N29 billion where the culprit opened up to 30 different accounts in Zenith bank of Nigeria, and many more. (The tribune, 2007)

Akin to this is the zealous and desirous attitude of Nigeria legislative council, especially the National Assembly which has turned their civil assignment to business enterprises. According to the documentation, the United States of America senators make an approximate annual income of \$174,000:00, while Nigerian senators take \$2,183,685:00 annually. What a degree of disparity between the two?! One the exorbitant amount taken by the National assembly, Olusegun Obasanjo, a Nigeria former President, was reported to have said that:

Members of the National Assembly pay themselves allowances for staff and offices they do not have or maintain. Once you are a member, you are co-opted and your mouth is stuffed with rot and corruption that you cannot opt out as you go home with not less than N15 million a month for a senator and N10million a month for a member of the House of Representatives. (Punch paper 2012)

From the illustrations, it is glaring that the gravity of greediness of Nigerian legislatures is depriving the economic growth and contributing to iniquity in the distribution of nation's wealth. The people's right to their country's resources have been dominated by a very few numbers of people. It is unfortunate that the legislature is taking these huge amounts in a nation where the large number of people are suffering of unemployment, where the government could not afford



more than N18,000 minimum wages for their employees, and where the masses are dying of poverty. What a tragedy! Generally, equity is aptly addressed in the Qur'ān as Allah commands of giving individual his own due, oppression in terms of money, rights, and many more are critically un-Islamic as Allah says:

Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and the giving of kith and kin, and He forbids all indecent deeds, and evil and rebellion. He instructs you that ye may receive admonition (Q16:90)

Considering the verse with what is happening in Nigeria today, one tends to know that there is no justification for the justice in the distribution of wealth among the Nigerian leaders. Based on this assertion, our understanding is that the application of *Zuhd* (asceticism) is suitable as a panacea for the current avarice and zealotry of people towards nation's wealth. However, we shall briefly look into the concept of *Zuhd* in Islam, and its relevance to reformation of Nigeria economic emancipation.

Meaning and Concepts of *Zuhd* in Islam

Literarily *Zuhd* according to a dictionary titled "Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic" means to abstain from, renounce, abandon, forsake, withdraw from, refuse to have anything to do with life, to renounce pleasure in worldly things, to become ascetic, and to lead pious ascetic life Cowan (1974). In view of the above definition, one tends to understand that either renunciation or total withdrawal from mundane affairs is impossible, because life and humankind are interwoven and inseparable (Deedat A,1997). This is why Allah Himself instructs that life is inevitable for man to live and that having portion from worldly materials is permissible, "... nor forget thy portion in this world" (Q28:77). By inference from the definition, we can understand that asceticism is very paramount when talking of *Zuhd*, and that *Zuhd* in this regard means living an absolute pious ascetic life. (Deedat A,1997)



Ibn Qayyim (1977), who defines *Zuhd* as abandoning a matter while despising it and while belittling its significance, so that one will exchange it for what is more significant. Based on this definition, *Zuhd* can be regarded as a regulatory element that seeks balance between the Muslims and the world, so that Muslims should trivialize the worldly affairs and materials as temporary and unreliable. This, however, would help them to use their possessions, powers, posts, etc. in this world to serve the next world, which is invariably referred to as significant by Ibn Qayyim. By having this concept among the humankind, there must be a room for justice, transparency and moral conduct in the affairs of the world, as Allah says: *Indeed Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives* (Q16:90). However, according to Ibn Qayyim's definition, *Zuhd* is regarded as justice and good conduct in the affairs of the world vis-à-vis the distribution of public and private wealth. (Ibn Qayyim, 1977)

In the definition of Ibn Taymiyyah, *Zuhd* entails abandoning what does not bring about benefit in the Hereafter (the way sunnah.wordpress.com, 1). This definition is also shared by Sufyān Ath-Thawrī who sees *Zuhd* as having short hope on life. Our understandings from the two definitions is that life is unworthy to be dignified, rather man should concentrate and focus the next life in everything he does, which is permanent. Allah says: *And this worldly life is not but amusement and diversions, but the home of the Hereafter is the best for those who fear Allah.* (Q6:32)

Imam az-Zuhri expresses *Zuhd* as avoidance of thanking Allah only for *ḥalāl* (lawful), and avoiding being patient only with forbidden (mufti wp .gov.my,1). This definition elucidates the importance of taking *ḥalāl* (lawful things) in all ramifications and avoidance of *ḥarām* (unlawful things) in whatever circumstances, most especially in the acquisition of worldly materials. *Zuhd* here however, refers to paramount taking of *ḥalāl*. (Doi 1981) In going further of the elucidation, Imam Hasan al-Basri expresses that *Zuhd* is not restricted to



prohibiting the *ḥalāl*, nor wasting money only, rather it entails being certain in what Allah has in His hands than what you have in your hand (mufti wp .gov.my,1). We can see that the definition of al-Basri is Al-Imām al-Mundhirī, (2013), mystically deeper beyond the realm of avoidance of *ḥarām* only, but he sees *Zuhd* as being satisfied with what pleases Allah and nothing else. *Zuhd* in this regard is an attempt to satisfy Allah alone with what pleases Him. By doing this, the level of *Zuhd* of the adherent would be a classical one, not an ordinary. This is why when was asked about the state of his *Zuhd*, al-Basri was reported to have said that:

- i. Verily, I know that my *rizq* (sustenance) can never be hijacked by anybody; therefore, my mind is at rest.
- ii. Verily, I know that my duty can never be done by anybody, so I stand firmly to do it.
- iii. Verily, I know that Allah is (every time) watching me, so I am ashamed of Him to see me on sin; and
- iv. Verily, I know that death is expecting me (watching my time to come), so I prepare a *zād* (supplement) for it to meet my Lord. (Higab, 1983)

In summary, this kind of *Zuhd* is regarded as accountability of deeds in life and contentment with Allah's decision and judgment. This is inclined to the Prophet who was reported to have said that: *Make the account of yourself (your deeds) before being accounted.* Another view to this is that *Zuhd* is described as abstinence, continence or an extreme devotion to religion at the cost of even the permissible limited freedom of enjoyment of worldly affairs, mostly in respect of familial social life. In the attempt to define *Zuhd*, Imam Ahmad in his contribution on *Zuhd* summarises three important aspects of *Zuhd*, he posits that *Zuhd* entails:

- i. avoiding the prohibited things. This is the *Zuhd* of the commoners.
- ii. abandoning what is not a necessity among the *ḥalāl* matters. This is the *Zuhd* of the distinguished people; and



iii. abandoning what can keep one from the remembrance of Allah.

This is the *Zuhd* of those who have knowledge in the religion.

Abu Sufyān ad-Darranī defines *Zuhd* as abstinence from anything capable of distracting Muslim's attention from Allah (www.abuamina.com, 1). *Zuhd*, according to this definition can be regarded as full dedication and commitment to Allah's worship with absolute adherence to His teachings. Although, doing this does not hinder Muslims from participating in the worldly affairs, remembrance of Allah in every ramification of life should be the priority, as Allah says:

Those who remember Allah while standing or sitting or (lying) on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth... (Q3:191).

Another definition closely related to this is that of *Imam* Junayd who expresses that *Zuhd* is to trivialise the worldly affairs and to remove its illumination in the mind. As a matter of fact, if the terrestrial enjoyment is trivial in the mind of a Muslim, definitely he has swapped it for the celestial one, which is permanent. And whatever circumstance, would be difficult for him to abstain from Allah's way. It also helpful to manage his life, no matter condition without committing atrocity nor sinned. Life to this category of people is vanity and incredible. (Hitti P.K.1934)

Ibn Mubarak sees *Zuhd* as having absolute dependence on Allah and passion for poverty. By interpretation, *Zuhd* here means referring every affair to Allah Who has absolute power on everything and to depend upon Him in every endeavour. Also, having passion for poverty here does not mean of impoverish our livelihood, but to see this world, no amount of possessions one acquired, as vanity and unworthy to be revered. This however would enable one to spend what he has in the course of Allah and get rid of living luxurious live or extravagance in everything, especially in spending, as Allah posits that: *And (they are) those who, when they spend, do so not excessively or sparingly, but are ever, between that, (justly) moderate* (Q25:67). Following this verse, the Prophet was reported to have prayed that: *Oh Allah! Let me be alive with poverty and take my soul in the state of*



poverty. Zuhd here can be referred to as *Tawakkul* and living an impoverish life, even if one is rich. (Hitti P.K.1934)

From the above illustrations, it is pertinent to note that the concept of *Zuhd* attracts various definitions by the scholars. Based on these definitions, one should understand that the concept of *Zuhd* does not restrict to asceticism alone but has hyperopic interpretations. In as much as life is unavoidable, hence *Zuhd* is an attempt to avoid totally *ḥarām* for *ḥalāl*, by living according to the Qur'ānic injunctions which is refers to ascetic life. *Zuhd* is also a justice, transparency and good moral conduct in the acquisition and distribution of wealth. It involves also a piety, giving of charity and avoidance of over-accumulation of wealth. It also has to do

with *‘Ibādah* (worship) *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) in everything, *tawakkul* (depending on Allah), and prefer of living a pious and moderate life to luxurious (having passion for poverty). *Zuhd* is a concept by which Allah and the life hereafter are profound and preferred in the mind of Muslim to this terrestrial life. It is also means accountability and contentedness with one's possession. However, Muslim should be contented with the states of his possession as the Prophet warns the Muslims to desist from competing on worldly materials unlawfully. On the authority of Abu Hurayrah who reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

أنظروا إلي من أسفل منكم ولا تنظروا إلي من هو فوقكم . فهو أجدر أن
تزدروا نعمة الله.

Look upon one who is in lower level (rank and wealth) than you, do not look unto him who is in higher level than you, because such is possible to make you trivialize (underrate) the favour Allah (upon you). (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3:1558)

The *Ḥadīth* denotes that Muslim should be contented with what he has, and he should avoid unhealthy competition in the accumulation of abnormal wealth, nor seeking for illegal position. By doing this will help him to be grateful to Allah,



cautioned from *ḥarām*, and conscious of *ḥalāl* all the times. In view of the analyses, understandingly, it is obvious that *Zuhd* is not restricted to pursuing a clerical life and shutting oneself in a remote monastery and cease work only, but making a good management of available resources in accordance with the Qur'ānic injunctions and prophetic traditions by using it for humanitarian services. It also includes avoidance of wasting money unnecessarily, equity and justice in the distribution of wealth among the people, refraining from excessive consumption or being keen on luxury, having magnanimity with lower class of people in the society, among others. Islamically, *Zuhd* as a concept is a theory which makes life more meaningful and worthy of living for all and sundry, especially in the sense of economic proliferation. (Hudsen, C.M.1977). However, the following are the ways by which *Zuhd* serves as panacea for economic emancipation in Nigeria.

***Zuhd* as a Panacea for the Economic Sustainability in Nigeria:**

From the foregoing illustrations, one tends to understand that corruption especially greediness has intimidated and suppressed the economic system of Nigeria. However, the economy of a nation can never be sustainable in a situation where there is inequality and injustice in the distribution of wealth among the citizens. This is the problem facing Nigeria economic situation currently. However, some of the followings are the recommendations by which the application of *Zuhd* is efficacious in the modification and revival of Nigeria economic system in.

i. Modification of salary structure of the Legislature. Basically, we have discussed earlier that the salary paid to the Nigeria National Assembly is exorbitant. The senators and representatives must know that they are representing the influence of the masses therefore they should not see themselves superior to others. And the money paying to them belongs to Nigerians. However, collecting huge amount as salary, couple with some allowances is improper and is considered as *ḥarām*, which in turn causes a large number of people to suffer, because their portions had been



taken by their leaders. The application of *Zuhd* by avoidance of abnormal possession of wealth and regulating the *ḥalāl* can help the situation. They must be paid according to their services any other payment, in this regard is *ḥarām*.

In an instance, one time governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, has discredited the huge amount paying to the National Assembly. He suggests that the half salary of a senator can be used to employ about 200 people, each earning a salary of N90,000 (Ninety thousand Naira). However, if 200 workers are multiplied by 109 (number of the senators), the result is 21,800 Nigerians would have opportunity to gain employment with good salary.

ii. The government projects need to be moderated. In the application of *Zuhd*, there must be no room for white elephant projects (the projects that are financed but unexecuted) as well as some unnecessary projects which had deprived the nation's economy by our leaders. Many projects had been fixed in Nigeria which not executed, while some are not important neither to the people nor the government, but a means of embezzling nation's money unjustly. If unwanted and falsified projects are removed, there must be enough resources for the economic sustainability in Nigeria.

iii. It is pertinent to use the concept of *Zuhd* especially justice and equality, in restructuring of wages, salaries and allowances in Nigeria. Issue of salary and wages in Nigeria is inequality and need modification. Professions like teachers, lecturers, administrative officers, Nigerian security agents, and many more are given very meager amount as salary. The salary gap among Nigeria workers is affecting the effort of government in the judicious circulation of wealth among the Nigerians. Therefore, abnormal discrimination of the workers' salary needs to be looked into by the government.

iv. Acquisition of wealth among the people is another factor constituting to economic problems in Nigeria. As a fact, Islam gives room for pursuing money in a lawful way, and that we are not equal in term of possession as ordained by Allah.



Nevertheless, there are specific numbers of people that were given license of authority by the government to import particular goods to Nigeria from other countries. This practice has contributed to Nigeria economic problem, because of monopoly of goods by those people. However, in the application of transparency and justice as conceptual parts of *Zuhd* on the nation's wealth should not be dominated by a single person or cooperate body to avoid oppression and intimidation. Equally, the rich should help the less privilege. They should understand that living luxurious life at the detriment of the poor masses is not in ally with the concept of *Zuhd* and is invariably un-Islamic. Therefore, they should extend their charity to others as instructed by Allah.

v. Akin to this is excessive acquisition of wealth by some influential men among Nigerians. Government should ensure that there is a particular law either by imposition of taxes as practiced in America or other measures that will guide the avaricious attitude of people towards acquisition of wealth in Nigeria. In the application of piety, charity, moral attitude, and accountability can regulate owning of abnormal property such as very expensive houses, flashy cars, and many more at the detriment of the masses that are suffering.

vi. In the executive arms of government, the salary structure as well as their allowances of the president and his deputy, governor and his deputy and other executive members should be regulated. In an instance, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was reported to have spent some days with his family despite the fact that he was the Head of State in Arabia without cooking anything like food in his home, but they fed only on date fruits and water. He was also reported to have prayed that: *O Allah! Provide for me what will be sustainable for me for a day*. He was reported to have died without leaving anything as property.



Conclusion:

Our discussion so far has ex-rayed the state of Nigeria economy and how it is mismanaged by the few people, among the political leaders, office holders and some influential men in Nigeria. The mismanagement of wealth has caused a lot of damage and poverty among the Nigerians and weakened the economic potentials of the nation. However, in the attempt to ensure the economic proliferation in Nigeria, the application of *Zuhd* is one of the sensitive strategies to control the current economic menace in Nigeria. Beyond the realm of general perception, it is shown in this paper that *Zuhd* is more than ordinary asceticism, but also piety, justice, equality and equity, charity, moral conduct, accountability, passion for poverty, remembrance of Allah, worship, and many more. In conclusion, if *Zuhd* is carefully applied in the system of management of resources in this nation, there must be a fair distribution and circulation of wealth among the citizens, which shall pave way for economic sustainability in Nigeria.

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